

THE REBEL'S NEW CLOTHES



W PUBLICATION

CLAUDIA

Postscript

ESCAPE routes only lead into a more sordid or dangerous reality. My G.P. once prescribed beta-blockers to calm my nerves before flying. Bombed out of my head, I stepped into the path of an oncoming car. My companion wrenched me back just in time. I laughed at the thought of being killed through fear of dying.

Most people fear life like I fear flying. Their various escape routes are attempts to flee this fear. They terror themselves up in the process by subordinating themselves to drugs, an ideology, or another person.

Schopenhauer suggested that the best way to tell one's true feelings for someone is to take note of the impression an unexpected letter from them makes when you first see it on the doormat. Perhaps one only realises one's true feelings for life when confronted by sudden death. Last winter I received a letter telling me a friend had jumped under a train. Joie de vivre surged for an instant between shock and grief. I saw my drab London street with eyes revived. The buses seemed redder, and the plane trees dustier. I savoured the city's smell of dog shit and diesel fumes. Later I read that people in the Blitz felt intensely alive as they rose each morning knowing they had survived while others had been killed. The threat of death gave 'a strange soaring of spirits . . . even the colours of the summer seemed heightened'.⁶ Moments of euphoria come as reminders of my fascination with life; a fascination that is all too easily stifled by the daily struggle against poverty and idiocy.

I have finally learned to amuse myself by following my own inclinations and ignoring social pressure. Too many people are ready to trade whatever individuality they have for social acceptance. Absurdly, they crave distraction from the selves they can never escape.

Notes

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* pp. 531–532 (Penguin).
2. George Orwell, 'The Road to Wigan Pier' in *George Orwell* (Secker and Warburg, 1980).
3. *Poll Tax Riot: Ten Hours That Shook Trafalgar Square* (ACAB Press, 1990).
4. See *Arkangel* No. 2, quoted in *Green Anarchist* No. 27.
5. Celine, *Journey to the End of the Night*, p. 359 (New Directions).
6. Angus Calder, *The People's War* p. 129 (Granada).

The Rebel's New Clothes



Claudia

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

I, Claudia – Feminism Unveiled
Love Lies Bleeding

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content with a partner to whom they pay as much attention as they do their old wallpaper.

Couples may split up more readily than in bygone days, but belief in the romantic idyll goes from strength to strength. People try over and over again to create the image of conjugal bliss, each time blaming 'failed' relationships on personality defects rather than their own impossible expectations.

It is patently absurd to modify one's own existence to fit in with that of another being. In their desperation to secure heaven on earth lovers cramp their own style to imaginary requirements. What is footbinding compared to wilful suppression of one's individuality?

Initially, I am sceptical when a person who appears to share my outlook on life. Scratch the surface, and a snivelling moralist or a lunatic will often emerge. In the rare instance of meeting a person I appreciate, the last thing I want to do is bind them to me. Affinity is intangible. At the first grasp it begins to trickle away like sand from between the fingers of a clutched hand.

Legions of women hope to escape wage-slavery by latching onto an affluent man. Economic dependence is another rat-trap. In most cases women stay with abusive men not because they are 'addicted to violence' but because they are convinced they have nowhere else to go, having renounced what little independence they had.

In flight from their fear of the outside world women cower under the shelter of one man, hoping he will protect them from the rest of his sex.

It seems that the wealthier women are, the drippier they become. Personal affluence does not necessarily enhance a woman's emotional self-sufficiency. A few years ago I found a diary in a skip. The author emerged as a career woman who had rebelled against her American family by running off to England. Her father had threatened to disinherit her. A divorcee, she was ferreting around Sloane and Hampstead circles for a new husband: 'It's hard to be a single woman anywhere, London, N.Y. . . . back home I burst into hysterical tears over the fact that I am not happily married in a pretty flat . . . if William won't marry me I want out now.'

This princess's boyfriend had evidently been tardy in offering his protective services. Ironically, she harboured violent fantasies against him. She described their fight over the hypothetical question of whether he would be prepared to pick her up from the tube if they lived in a 'bad neighbourhood?' He had replied that it would depend on what he was doing at the time. She had become hysterical because she believed her ex-husband had showed a similar negligence towards her safety: 'It's enough to drive any well-educated woman to violence . . . I really could have killed him'.

Predictably enough, women suffer far more from the men who purport to protect them than from any 'lurking stranger'.

Those who believe their happiness rests upon another person live on a knife-edge of terror. They are on constant alert for signs of waning devotion. With so much at stake, it is no wonder they fight desperately to control the repository of their emotional well-being.

The power struggle intensifies as each partner blames the other for their rage and frustration. Domestic violence is a logical upshot of this process. It is more often the resort of males as they tend to be physically stronger and so more likely to get away with it. Affairs and suicide attempts are also part of the arsenal of tactics designed to bend the partner to one's will.

Romantic love inspires murder, suicide and terminal boredom. Wives are probably telling the truth when they say they had 'no idea' their husbands were rapists or child molesters. Spouses prefer to coexist for years without ever seeing more than they want to in each other. Each is



About the Author

Claudia has lived in, visited, and travelled around over forty countries in the Americas, Europe and Asia. She feels at home in most big cities, given a ready supply of books and alcohol. Her occupations have included working in bookshops, cleaning, pavement-painting, art-modelling, and touting for discos. At the moment she is trying to escape The Elephant and Castle.

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Men in love are content with very little, for they are convinced they have the world. Such is the strength of their self-delusion that it comes as a total surprise that their partners should try to aim a little higher.

A boy who lived down my street woke up one morning to find his wife had run off with the friend who shared their flat. When a 'Dear John' letter arrived from Bangkok he demolished his kitchen and had to be hauled off to cool down in police cells. He was the only one in the neighbourhood to have been taken by surprise. To everyone else it had been glaringly obvious that the pair were planning an escapade.

The wife left two years ago. Since then, the jilted husband has dedicated himself to nurturing his obsession with her. He gave up his job and took to his bed during the day. At night he played 'their' records over and over. Ensconsed in his armchair he would brood over the reasons why she went. Anyone who visited would be regaled with plans to 'win her back'. He used to question me 'as a woman' about what qualities I thought his rival might have that he had not.

My neighbour's reaction was moderate compared to that of other males. Another acquaintance blew his brains out when his wife left him. A local man followed his wife into the domestic violence unit of his local police station and stabbed her to death.

Such insanity results from damaged egos rather than grief. Rejection is intolerable to most males for it confirms their darkest self-doubts.

Women, on the other hand, are so imbued with romantic mythology that they feel cheated when the rose-tinted fantasy clears enough for them to discover the half subhuman by their sides. Many become embittered as a consequence and take up feminism. This is a convenient ideology, as it encourages women to blame men and society for their disillusionment, whereas they might do better by taking steps to eradicate their own gullibility.

Others contrive to discard their disappointing lovers. They become outgoing and vivacious for just as long as it takes to pick up a new romance. When a woman who has been out of circulation for years, buried in her domestic cosiness, starts taking an interest in old friends it is a sign that her illusions in her partner are evaporating. An overwhelming fear of the outside world prevents most females from actually leaving the partner they detest until they have a new one lined up.

My neighbour's errant wife had endured six dismal years with her husband, waiting for someone to 'take her away'. Like most of her sex, she believed that a man could rescue her from poverty and boredom.

Fashions may change but the dream remains. The bronzed lion-hunting hero of twenties' romantic fiction has been replaced by the gentleman (with the emphasis on 'gentle') who spouts 'equality'.

snort coke with other members of the city's gilded youth. Listening to their interminable discussions about the quality of the latest supply (smuggled over from Bolivia by one of their number 'for a laugh'), I felt bored and decided to move on. Later, I heard she had married one of her playboy dealers. I imagine that any child they may have will, in its turn, grow up loathing the futility of its parents' existence.

Water will course far and deep underground until it finds a way back to its original level. The rebel mirrors this process. I have friends, born of Midlands schoolteachers, who, after several years of drug abuse and petty crime in London, have married and gone back to the North to take their teaching certificates. Substantial inheritances have enabled erstwhile Anarchists to 'go into business' – just as their parents would have wished. It is easier to return to the familiar. Like water, people choose the path of least resistance.

The illusory sanctuary of couplehood is the most popular escape route of all. Like heroin and mysticism, romance cocoons quailing souls from the world. Almost every young man and woman believes that their lives will turn out rosy if only they can catch and keep the right partner.

Initially, a romantic liaison does wonders for the confidence of a social misfit, hence they are apt to attach undue importance to affairs of the heart. Secretly astonished that another person should desire them, they turn a blind eye to possible defects in their admirers. Those who seek love as a distraction from themselves are desperately manipulative and possessive.

Heterosexual men rarely feel human unless they have a woman by their side. Since they live with 'the nightmare of having to admit the halt subhuman we were fobbed off with as a small-sized universal ideal, a superman from morning to night' it is no wonder they are desperate to cling to a mother-figure.⁵ They need to be able to drop the pretence in front of someone who, for her part, will play the game by deferring to her man in public. Hence the fearful man seeks an alliance with someone even more self-abasing than he. His grip on life is dependent on keeping at least one human being convinced of his superiority.

The halt subhuman crumbles to dust without his fan club of one. Every pub has its permanent fixture: the man who, at the hint of a sympathetic ear, will cry into his beer over 'the love he lost'. He broadcasts his intentions to sort out the bastard who stole her heart. Having taken care of that matter, he swears that he will win her back by proving he's changed his ways.

I have seen many boys use their lovelorn status as a rationale for alcoholism, heroin addiction or insanity. Looking at them, I was never surprised that their beloved ones had departed.

Rebellion

Ordinary life is so dull I get out of it as much as possible.

Sex Pistol Steve Jones

THE fearful and unimaginative like to have their lives mapped out for them as they grow up. Gratefully they settle down into the ranks of Arndale shoppers. The rest look around and wonder if this is all they have to look forward to. Feeling there must be more to life than going to work and getting pissed at weekends, they fall into scenes that purport to offer a different kind of life. The lucrative industry of rebel culture provides a plethora of 'alternatives'. Spiritual cults, revolutionary politics, good works, sex, drugs, travel, creativity, and insanity are seen as means of escape from a dreary world.

School set me on a course of rebellion. By the age of twelve I had realised that the function of education was to accustom me to doing things that I did not like. On a scholarship to an academic girls' school, I resolved to avoid the professional career for which I was being groomed. The ancient Dames and Baronesses who came in to give us pep talks assured us that there is nothing that a woman cannot achieve if she only tries hard enough. The prospect of being made a peeress after a lifetime in industry was infinitely depressing.

It was taken for granted that I would marry and have children. I decided to take whatever steps necessary to avoid this doom. The wives and mothers around me were poor advertisements for the destinies they extolled. Indeed, neighbourhood matrons had presented a petition to my parents asking them to bar me from hanging out in the street. I imagined they feared my influence over their teenage sons; my mother thought they were more worried about their husbands.

The school playground is a microcosm of the world, with its bullies, toadies, victims and outcasts. I was a misfit who longed for popularity. Each day I went to school praying that my one friend would not be away sick. If she was, then I would have to endure the public humiliation of walking by myself during break.

I tried to become accepted. I joined in discussions of T.V. programmes, never admitting I had not been allowed to watch them. I learned to shut up about things that might have made me conspicuous, telling no one of my enthusiasm for astronomy and Japanese. My efforts to ingratiate myself were a complete waste of time. My childhood classmates sensed my fundamental lack of enthusiasm for house-points, team games, Girl Guides, The Health and Beauty movement, and The Man From U.N.C.L.E. As a teenager I had neither invitations nor desire to join my schoolfellows at balls and hunt-meets.

In my twenties I finally won the popularity I craved by being bolder and more outrageous than anyone else. Hangers-on hoped I'd send a bit of excitement spinning their way. I learned that a girl only has to be vivacious and a sympathetic listener to be liked.

Now I find that social success is not all it is cracked up to be. Most people are dreary entertainment-seekers. Too often I have felt like a performing monkey or an unpaid psychotherapist.

Someone once said that the only advantage of a public school education is that it prepares one for the trials of life. I know that I shall never have to endure anything so relentlessly terrible. For as an adolescent I lacked the self-reliance that enables one to look for exits in adult life. On my second morning I lay awake before school, staring hopelessly into the endless years ahead. Week after frozen week I stood on the lacrosse pitch praying that the ball would not come my way. The sight of planes overhead, pulling out from Heathrow, filled me with unbearable longing. I even envied the pigeons that swooped between the school blocks. There was no imaginable escape short of suicide.

I grew up hating the world I knew: with youthful optimism I thought there might be a better one beyond. While crossing off the days until I could leave the manicured lawns of suburbia forever I skipped school in the quest for a more exotic life. Truant wanderings took me to Earls Court bedsits where I dined with foreign men who wore frocks and make-up. Most of them were on the run from military service in their own countries. I was given a ragged Bedouin dress and learned to roll joints. For the first time, I felt no pressure to modify my behaviour.

Thus I got the idea that I might be able to shake free from the moral strait-jacket of my upbringing by mingling with rogues. For the next twelve years I associated almost exclusively with junkies, revolutionaries, prostitutes and thieves. After a while I noticed that a disproportionate number of the so-called underclass came from similar backgrounds to my own.

Those who reject the values of the British public-school system gravitate easily towards the lowest echelons of society. Bred for the top, they have learned to despise mediocrity. The prospect of an inheritance

Romance

I'm not looking for a new England/I'm just looking for another girl.

song by Billy Bragg

HAVING discovered that isolation of the soul cannot be overcome by joining political grouplets or druggy circles, rebels decide to seek a 'deeper' union of two minds and bodies. Indeed, some young rebels are so horrified by their experiences in the lower depths, that their shattered idealism propels them back to the path of righteousness with doubled enthusiasm. They spend the rest of their lives spitting outrage at 'wasters' and 'degenerates'.

'Deviant' images are carefully designed signals to potential mates. 'Alternative' scenes are prowling grounds of the young. To a lesser extent, they are the haunts of older figures, usually male, who have tired of their domestic arrangements and are on the lookout for fresh pickings.

When rebels graduate into couplehood they usually drop all anti-social posturing. Deciding they have 'grown up', they proceed to follow mainstream society's bizarre prescription for a happy and fulfilled life. Their parents once existed to be rebelled against; now they become role models. Most people, however much they despise their backgrounds and try to escape them, eventually return to the social milieu of their childhood. They recover the accents, values and economic status that they once tried so hard to discard.

As they age, rebels become the rebelled against. I once stayed in a luxury Sao Paulo tower-block with a twenty-five year old girl and her widowed mother. Every night the girl would escape the autocratic mother (who had subjected her to a medical examination that year to ensure her virginity) by driving around the city looking for cocaine. One night she pulled up with tears streaming down her face, saying 'I would rather die than live like my mother. When she is not at the doctor's for her imaginary illnesses she is sitting with her miserable friends complaining about their maids. I shall never live like that, never, never!' Her idea of escape was to

nothing more than get on people's nerves and waste energy better spent on amusing myself. Thus I eventually learned the futility of joining forces with self-conscious rebels whose defiance is merely a knee-jerk reaction to convention.

allows them to sneer at the working and middle classes scrabbling after the illusion of security.

George Orwell recorded his own descent into the lower depths in 'Down and Out in Paris and London' and 'The Road to Wigan Pier'. Yet he never managed to rid himself of the snobbery he had acquired at Eton and in the Colonial Service. He met his Waterloo in a Wigan boarding-house, where his fastidiousness was revolted by a full chamber-pot under the breakfast table. He remained convinced that the working-classes smelled a lot worse than his social peers, due to the lack of washing facilities in their houses. These days, if anyone eschews cleanliness it is the upper middle-class rebel, who disdains personal hygiene as a bourgeois neurosis.

Some of the filthiest dwellings I have ever seen were occupied by young people from wealthy backgrounds. A friend of mine moved to London after being expelled from public school. Determined to dedicate his life to art and drug abuse he squatted an imposing townhouse with older boys from the same school. He sculpted a centrepiece for the living-room out of dried cat-shit. It had pride of place amidst the litter of syringes and congealed take-away containers.

Recently an acquaintance, another former public schoolboy, disappeared for a while. I thought he must have finally managed to O.D. and die, but eventually tracked him down to a tenement behind King's Cross station, a haunt of dealers and hookers. I found him nodding out on a stained mattress amid a forest of piss-filled Evian bottles. Women tripped past the open door, leading their besuited customers upstairs (well-born Englishmen never seem to grow out of their taste for squalor). The floor of the adjoining room was splattered with turds where those who had come to score had relieved themselves. It was the filthiest place I had seen since the ladies toilets at Calcutta Zoo.

The public school dropout contingent polarises between those who opt for revolutionary politics and the libertines who take up drug abuse with a vengeance. The latter often form rock bands in an attempt to win kudos and sexual favours. Their artistic endeavours and drug habits are usually financed with allowances from their parents.

Some of the albies and junkies who spend their afternoons begging down the West End had the finest education money can buy, or so they were told. They distinguish themselves from more plebian dossers not only by their accent but by their lack of visible tattoos. It would be hard to retreat into a professional career in later life with HATE tattooed across the knuckles.

It helps to have good connexions when arrested for begging or drug dealing. I know upper-middle-class miscreants whom the law tries desperately hard to keep out of gaol, no matter how many times they have

been arrested. An army of psychiatrists, probation officers, and drug and alcohol counsellors is kept busy with the task of returning the black sheep to the fold. This system reinforces itself, for many of the redeemers had, or have, drug or alcohol problems themselves.

The children of the lower orders have a far greater tendency either to die, or to end up in penal or mental institutions. Not worth trying to save, they must be kept where they can harm no one but themselves.

Those with less to fear from the law can prove a liability to their fellows. Last year a junkie neighbour overdosed and died before he had managed to inject the entire contents of his syringe. A plummy young man who had called to score made a lunge for the works on the floor. The dead man's flatmates restrained him as he pleaded with them to let him use the remaining heroin. He wanted to refill the works with Special Brew 'to fool the police'.

Underground culture glamourises drug use. I still salivate when I hear the Lou Reed song 'Heroin'. A friend of mine was a regular alcoholic until he read Burroughs. A hundred years ago he might have swigged absinthe in a Parisian garret. Today he sticks needles in his arm in a Harlem tenement, periodically reviving sufficiently to pen a few words about his existence.

There is almost nothing more boring than reading about other people's drug experiences. As a way of life drug-taking is no more interesting than accountancy. One might as well take the 8.15 into the City every day as live a junkie existence. Most face every morning knowing they will have to go out stealing, begging or whoring in order to raise the money to score. They talk of 'going to work' without irony.

Of course, many drug addicts do not see themselves as rebels. I have met teachers, bank clerks, journalists and office bureaucrats who hold down the jobs that finance their addictions. For its part, work generally inspires over-indulgence in drugs or alcohol. Almost everyone I have ever worked with had a strong penchant for narcotics of one kind or another. I find a day's labour can bring on the desire for mental annihilation. This is not so much due to the strain of the work itself as the shit one is supposed to take from so-called superiors.

In contrast to middle-class 'dropouts' working-class male friends turned to organised crime in order to amass the cash that would enable them to broaden their horizons. Faced with a lifetime of factory labour, they regarded intermittent gaol sentences as an inevitable price to pay for the avoidance of wage slavery. As one of them said, 'What's three months for a hundred thousand dollar fraud?'

Outlaw circles exert strong pressure on their members to conform to their own rules ('deviant' groups are rigidly hierarchical arrangements – from political sects to junkie households who respect those with the most

In Athens comrades are distinguished from class enemies by geometric arrangement. Local anarchists took me to their hangout, a city 'square' laid out in the form of a right-angled triangle. All three sides were lined with pavement cafes. Those at the base of the triangle were frequented by 'comrades'. Those lining the hypotenuse were the haunts of local thieves. These, I was told, were not to be trusted as some were suspected of having informed on the anarchists. Besides they only stole for personal gain and not for 'the movement'. The latter was financed with the help of politically motivated motorcyclists, who rode their vehicles into jewellers' windows, enabling comrades to liberate the stock from within.

The anarchists reserved most of their contempt for the habitués of the third side of the triangle. 'Junkies,' they spat, 'some of them used to be comrades.' It was rumoured that undercover police had initially plied these renegades with heroin in order to wean them away from politics. I had heard this sort of conspiracy theory before. Some kind of devil has to be blamed for tempting 'lapsed' revolutionaries from the fold. It is never accepted that comrades leave of their own volition, because they are sick of the pretensions and petty power struggles.

One night my Athenian hosts interrupted their subversive activities (which included sabotaging the light-show of a Communist Party disco) to take me to meet the eminence gris of the movement. I knew I would be expected to deliver the inevitable report on the state of the class struggle in Britain, so I had brushed up my act a little following my experience in Bologna. I was ushered onto the balcony of a splendid flat where a group of men awaited. They solemnly listened to my discourse, offering me nothing more fortifying than coffee. On my way to the house I had been told that my host had a highly militant and altogether admirable wife. As I departed I glimpsed a woman through a doorway, stretched out on a bed, gazing at the ceiling. I asked my escorts why she had not joined us on the balcony and was informed that she had a headache, brought on by the intensity of her worry about the working-class.

I have since met many people who regard self-pity as an impermissible indulgence. They are attracted to revolutionary activism, regarding it as a licence to be miserable. Feeling sorry for faceless masses absorbs the energy they might otherwise put into sorting themselves out.

The prospect of mass rebellion offers reassurance to all those creatures like myself who grow up with the sense of being an outsider. It is comforting to imagine that one is not alone. Political activists fall for the myth that personal malaise can be overcome in the attempt to change other people. It took me a few years to realise that a society run by women instead of men, or by the proletariat, would make no difference to my own feelings of separateness. My efforts to bring about social change did

In this spirit they pour vitriol on all those who talk of 'pulling a bird' rather than 'developing a relationship'. Any word or phrase common in working-class parlance, particularly if it concerns sex, is liable to give offence. Even terms of endearment, like 'love', 'sweetheart', or 'darling' are considered patronising, unless delivered in camp rather than cockney tones.

I have had a few altercations with the self-appointed arbiters of the English language. On several occasions I have been interrupted by some fellow who objected to my use of the word 'cunt'. They complained that it is 'offensive to women'. I don't know which sex they thought I belonged to.

In this country rich kids playing politics think that, in order to be taken seriously, they have to adopt the lifestyle of the working-class (or rather, what they imagine this to be. The latest trend among revolutionaries, I hear, is to become supporters of third division football clubs. They hope this will imply that they were raised in some grim northern town or unfashionable London suburb). Revolutionaries in Mediterranean countries, on the other hand, spurn the austere and self-denying existences of their British comrades. South Europeans do not bother to camouflage their 'educated' accents, nor do they feel obliged to live in squalor, however temporary. In fact they sneer at anyone who shows signs of behaving like the oppressed masses. I blotted my copybook with Parisian autonomists by getting pissed on bottles of cheap wine, the kind that turns your lips black. I was stiffly informed that only clochards (winos) drank the stuff.

The gilded youth of Spain and Italy see no reason to alter the external trappings of their lives. They simply seek glamour and notoriety by letting off bombs and kidnapping their friends' fathers. They are highly scornful of people like me, who could not care less about firearms or explosives.

Travelling through Italy I dropped into Bologna's radical bookshop, hoping to meet like-minded fellows who might put me up for the night. I was whisked off in a car to visit 'Comrade Walter' who lived in a villa on a hilltop outside the city. We rolled in through iron gates, past a 'PRIVATE PROPERTY KEEP OUT' sign. Comrade Walter presided over the table while comrade wife silently prepared the dinner and tended the baby. I guzzled the excellent food and wine, and tried to sustain a plausible discourse on 'the situation' in England. I realised I was being taken for an emissary from some shadowy British equivalent of the Brigadi Rossi. When I was rash enough to confess that no, I did not know where to obtain arms for 'the cause' comrade Walter signalled to comrade chauffeur to drive me back into the city, where I had to pay for a hotel.

massive habit). Villains find it hard to take early retirement, for example. Their mates grow suspicious if they withhold their assistance from further illegal ventures.

Other working-class friends delved into what they saw as 'middle-class' culture. In the late sixties and early seventies they began to take dope and acid, and read IT and Oz. They saw Bowie at the Roundhouse and took the Magic Bus to India. Now they are back in London, trying to resist eviction from their 'manors' by gentrification. As long as they have their dope, they are glad to have avoided the rat-trap of work and family. Their old schoolmates are on their second or third marriage or gaol sentence and are usually paying maintenance for a mass of offspring.

The belief that the grass is always greener is integral to rebellion. Middle-class western kids take off in search of spiritual enlightenment in the Himalayas, while wealthy Indian boys pose in leather on motorbikes. The hippies and would-be Brandos eye each other in mutual contempt.

Whereas their British counterparts looked east for inspiration French intellectuals of the fifties and sixties investigated the voodoo-type cults of the Americas. They liked to imagine that the wretched of the earth could escape their misery by periodically whizzing out of their bodies. De Beauvoir wrote that the negroes of Bahia in north-east Brazil 'cultivate those techniques which will help them obtain a state of ecstasy and so tear themselves free of the false earthly manifestation in which they have been imprisoned . . . The supreme moment of her [the participant's] individual life – when she is transformed from pancake vendor or dishwasher into Ogun or Yemanjá is also one in which the 'daughter of the saints' becomes more closely integrated with the rest of the community.'¹

Rather than a metaphysical escape-route, candomblé* is a means for certain women to hold their neighbours in thrall. It is closely linked with the Catholic Church. In the early years of slavery thousands of apparently healthy slaves dropped dead from 'banzo' sickness – an intolerable craving for their homeland. If the African religions were not eradicated it may have been because they were viewed as a relatively innocuous means of preserving the slave population.

I stayed at the house of a candomblé priestess (mãe de santo) in Bahia. A regular churchgoer, she had hung a picture of the Pope next to her effigies of African divinities (in the spirit of integration that devised a written alphabet for the North American Cree Indians in order to print prayer-books, the Church gave Christian saints' names to African gods).

* Candomblé is the name of the cult in North Brazil. Similar cults of African origin are known, for example, as Macumba in southern Brazil and Voodoo in the West Indies.

My hostess took me to a candomblé ceremony. Women in voluminous net skirts circled to a hypnotic drumbeat. After a couple of hours they began to fall down in trances. Their rigid forms were carried into a backroom in which their earthly spirits were recalled to a chicken dinner.

Candomblé is not merely a panacea for the dispossessed. Even Presidents of Brazil consult *mães de santos*. On a more modest level, my priestess held power over her shanty town. Neighbourhood women came to her backyard shrine, offering food in return for a consultation. As her guest, the door of every shack was open to me.

In Britain, disillusionment with political agitation has led to a growing interest in the paranormal. Manifestations of this trend range from Mystic Meg's 'messages from beyond' in the *News of the World*, to crustie shamans, to New Ageists. Traditionally, witchcraft has held an especial appeal to women, who are virtually excluded from mainstream religion and politics. Like political agitation, spell-casting holds the promise of control over one's environment and destiny.

Altruism is an escapist fantasy beloved by the middle-classes. My female classmates at university deluded themselves that they were thumbing their noses at capitalist society by opting for 'caring' careers. Whereas their grandmothers sailed to Africa to 'help' black babies and develop crushes on male missionaries, these young women gave 'support' to 'disadvantaged' kids in Hackney playgroups and panted after youth leaders.

My fellow graduates pretended they had chosen their careers out of some desire to help humanity. At a farewell party I was cornered by a gaggle of classmates pontificating on 'our duty to make up for the privileges of our education'. I knew this meant they were about to earn hefty salaries from bossing the 'underprivileged' around, while searching for a husband amongst their male counterparts.

These women had discovered feminism while at college. They spent hours moaning about the deficiencies of the male sex. This was a tactic designed to attract the 'right' sort of man who would come across with apologies for his brutish brothers. Their search for the ideal mate took these feminists into careers that attracted 'non-sexist' men. They flocked around play-group leaders, left-wing solicitors, and managers of housing coops.

Anti-sexist men often brandish saxophones or paintbrushes as indications of depth and sensitivity. 'Artist' is an even more favoured rebel image than junkie or revolutionary. Creativity is believed to be a quick route to fame and fortune, although until recently it was considered uncool for an artist to admit to ambition. Paradoxically, these rebels crave recognition from a society they profess to despise. The talentless offspring

compensate for their alcoholism or drug addiction. I know a couple of vegans who tacked a list of all the carcinogenic E numbers to their kitchen wall. They were hardened alcoholics whose idea of a romantic Sunday morning was sharing a sick bucket.

Other vegans I have known used their diet as an excuse for never leaving their home towns in case they could not find suitable food. Their most exotic indulgence was a dahl and rice from the local Indian take-away.

There are a lot of moral folk around who claim they could not swallow their food if they thought that by doing so they would be supporting some murderous dictator. I have drunk with North Americans who refused to buy Russian vodka or Bulgarian wine because they did not want to 'give money to communists'. Over here South Africa perennially heads the list of nasty regimes. In the seventies Chile and Argentina came high on the league table, while in my parents' day no self-respecting radical could holiday in Spain or drink that country's sherry. I was once stuck in a self-service cafe queue behind a Class War supporter who was harassing the serving-woman: 'Is that Tate and Lyle sugar? It is important you know.' I pushed past as he began a lecture on Tate and Lyle's links with South Africa. I thought of Orwell who longed to send all the creeping-Jesus socialists back to Welwyn Garden City. I would condemn every revolutionary prig to a life sentence on a Sainsbury's check-out till.

Boycotts and disinvestment campaigns make their supporters feel virtuous. The smug and the stupid ignore the past and present misery created by their own governments, preferring to write to Safeways demanding clear labels on South African produce. Petitioning the British government to make the South African regime treat its black citizens more kindly is the equivalent of asking Hitler to root out anti-semitism in the S.S.

Today's Newspeak is the language of political correctness. As members of the middle-class, revolutionaries find it imperative to keep a safe distance between themselves and the proletariat. Modern snobs have replaced the epithet 'common' with 'racist', 'sexist', or 'homophobic'. They pull out the term 'classist' whenever they feel the wealthy are under attack.

Nancy Mitford said that 'drawing-room', 'sofa', 'scent', 'mad', and 'lavatory' are better than 'lounge', 'settee', 'perfume', 'mental', and 'toilet', because 'we' say so. 'We' were the rich and titled*. Her successors present the slightly more subtle argument that they are acting on behalf of the weak and oppressed.

* In the 1950s Nancy Mitford wrote *Noblesse Oblige* which distinguishes between 'U' and 'Non-U' language, as a means of separating 'ladies and gentlemen' from 'plebians'.

skin, at least when they go to meetings. I know one supporter of animal rights who is careful to leave his sheepskin at home whenever he goes out to meet his comrades.

The appeal of animals lies in their inability to speak for themselves. There is always a danger that other 'causes' – women, blacks, the working-class, will turn around and tell their avengers to fuck off. The politically righteous need victims to defend in order to give themselves the moral weight to bully those around them.

I have seen North American anti-fur campaigners squirm under accusations of racism. Our smug Little Englanders are unaware that trapping is, or was, the livelihood of Inuit, Indian, and Siberian peoples. The sullenness and desolation of a Cree Indian reservation in northern Ontario reminded me of British mining towns whose pits have been closed down. After trapping was banned there was nothing to do but cash welfare cheques, peddle dope, and (ironically enough) ferry tourists out to fish in the Hudson Bay.

The most extreme animal liberationists could not care less about the effects of hunting bans on humans. In order to appear 'outrageous', activists such as gaoled ALF member Ronnie Lee advocate mass extermination of humans⁴. They argue that this would give lebensraum back to our sorely wronged four-legged friends.

Not content with trying to enforce a dress code in the name of wee tim'rous cowering beasties the politically correct take it upon themselves to supervise other peoples' diets. Vegans are apt to turn unpleasant if they suspect any form of animal product has infiltrated their homes. I used to retaliate by pointing out that the glue on their rolling-papers is made of boiled bones and their beer is filtered through isinglass (the air bladder of a sturgeon). They found this information confusing.

I gave up eating meat twenty years ago after a school outing to a factory farm. Lately, when I mention this, acquaintances either look guilty or call me a moralistic bastard. Many people have been turned right off the idea of a meat-free diet by crusading vegans. This sanctimonious crew, who generally only manage to stick to their fad for a year or so, are thus unlikely to bring about any amelioration of animal suffering.

Veganism is a creed that appeals to the British Puritan mentality, which has always been suspicious of food as a source of sensual pleasure. The brown rice brigade who conflate diet with morality follow in the footsteps of a Mr. Stanley Green. Beliving passion to be the root of all unrest, he has spent the last twenty years parading up and down Oxford Street with his 'LESS PROTEIN, LESS PASSION' placard.

Food faddists do tend to be rather passionless, unhealthy people. This is often because they have forced themselves to live on 'healthy' food to

of the already rich and famous provide role models. They form the vanguard of 'new-wave' musicians, avant-garde painters, and 'alternative' comedians.

Most aspiring artists give up when faced with effort. If they cannot pick up a guitar and instantly play like Hendrix they prefer to dabble. Fear of failure prevents them from making a concerted attempt to express themselves. They would rather muddle along in their deadly jobs, ostensibly saving money to back their creative endeavours.

Weary of sanctimonious husband-hunters and their consorts I found friends amongst women who worked as prostitutes and peep-show dancers. I was attracted by their apparent cynicism. My best friend of those years came from a strict Catholic background, like most of the women I knew in the sex industry. She said her mother had always threatened that she would end up a whore: 'If my mother said this was such a terrible fate I thought there must be something in it'

I enjoyed meeting my friend at the Soho clip-joint where she spent her evenings relieving suckers of their cash. Men were persuaded to cough up £30 for a glass of water with a parasol stuck in it, while the advertised 'Porno on the Big Screen' proved to be Coronation Street or Dallas on TV. During the day this woman operated a small brothel from the house next door to mine. I would drink with her colleagues in the kitchen as they waited for punters. Whoring seemed to be about as dull as working in an office, although better paid. Both types of work involve humouring tedious men. At least you can show a punter the door.

I had assumed that my hooker friends, both male and female, would despise all their customers. Although they took the piss out of them mercilessly, and indeed, were often paid to do so, they would occasionally refer to a john as interesting or good-looking. When I expressed surprise at this a former employee of Cynthia Payne's made the pertinent observation that with my attitude to people I should not even serve in a shop let alone go on the game.

Disillusionment set in when I overheard some of the women from the clip-joint slagging off my friend: 'she gets her kids' clothes from jumble sales. I wouldn't be seen dead doing that.' These same women refused to go to a nightclub with me because they thought my Dr. Marten's boots unsuitable. It sunk in that this crew placed as much value on money and appearances as any social-climbing young wife in the suburbs.

Behind their cynical façades these women shared the dreams of their so-called respectable sisters. The hookers I knew wanted nothing more than domestic bliss with some man who would 'love' them (the one exception was a woman in her fifties who endlessly plotted revenge on the ex-husband who had 'exploited' her. She warned the younger girls of

the danger of renouncing their financial independence, while heedlessly, they continued to fall for representatives of Soho's Maltese mafia). Like my university fellows they hoped their line of work would introduce them to the man of their dreams.

Most had made some attempt to have 'a family'. They had had repeat pregnancies but lacked the nous to prevent social workers from removing their offspring. Like the majority of the female sex, they kept falling in love with men who were either violent, or emotional and financial drains.

Many people prefer logistical to social escape. They hope they will feel better somewhere else. Tourists are straightforward consumers; travellers are tourists with pretensions. They suck at foreign cultures as though they were mind-expanding elixirs. People who would never venture onto a British council estate seem to find third world poverty spiritually uplifting. In India I saw droves of Quentins and Sophies taking pictures of children breaking rocks at the roadside. At sunset these doughty travellers could be found spreading their mattresses on hotel rooftops. They would twist themselves into peculiar shapes while flourishing their copies of the Ramakrishnan.

I find travel is not so much a means of escape as an intensification of life. It forces me to live on my wits, and come out of my shell to talk to strangers. My heightened senses swing from euphoria - on a night-train to Leningrad through a blizzard - to misery - on a Delhi commuter train, crushed between the gropers and the gawkers.

Travel, like drugs, produces a come-down. Back in the land of broken phones and sex-offenders I miss the challenge. Hagglng with pickled-garlic vendors in a Moscow market requires greater mental agility than standing in the queue at Tesco's.

When abroad I try to avoid the international blight of drongoes by staying in areas considered unsafe or uninteresting by Lonely Planet (this strategy is not failsafe; even on a rainy night in the Belizean jungle some pipsqueak of a backpacker popped up, telling me to 'abide by local rules and regulations'). It is even harder to dodge those trying to escape their social roots. I often find myself in collision with the sort of economically secure person who likes to relieve their boredom by dabbling with the underclass.

I recently offended some feminists, for example, when I told them I had modelled for a magazine diet feature. 'Was I not aware of the sort of pressure society puts on women to lose weight?' (If anyone took this sort of pressure seriously I suppose it should have been me as a 'before' example.) It was beyond their comprehension that I would do such a job simply for the money. They did not want to hear my explanation that

Young Puritans almost always have an escape route provided for them in the form of an inheritance. They either bask in the security of the prospect, or, if one has already been offered them, make a show of turning it down. Rather than give it away, however, they let it remain in the family until the day they decide to swap their hair-shirts for a Savile Row suit.

An elderly woman once told me that 'you can always tell a lady by her gloves'. Apparently silk was a must before the first world war, after which cotton became acceptable, 'but never, ever, nylon'. Nowadays one can spot high-born youth by the extreme scruffiness of their apparel. The most ill-kempt come from the wealthiest backgrounds. Scrofulous 'crusties' and punks reveal their origins as soon as they open their mouths. Public-school accents stick like the mark of Cain (I know, because I have one myself).

Behind their dreadlocks and rags these young people are as snobbish as their bourgeois parents. They give themselves airs of moral superiority by rejecting clothes whose manufacture involves 'cruelty'. By this they do not mean the sweatshops of the garment industry. 'Cruelty' is a word only associated with animals, particularly those of the furry, melting brown-eyed variety.

Last winter I was surprised at the amount of venom spat at me when I wore a fur coat that I had acquired in Portobello for a tenner. I went down to an anti-war protest outside the US embassy. As soon as I entered Grosvenor Square a couple of demonstrators stopped shouting at the building and began screeching abuse at my fur coat. I suppose it made a more tangible target for their self-righteousness than the distant bombers of Baghdad.

One freezing night I ventured out to one of those massive squat parties that are advertised by a cluster of police around the entrance. As I entered everyone in the room fell silent and turned to glare at me. I wondered what social gaffe I had made. My companion pointed out that I had broken their dress code by wearing fur. No one had the guts to remonstrate with me; a pity as I should have liked to ask what they imagined their Dr. Martens were made of. The latter have long been standard wear for revolutionaries, as part of their macho image. Furs are despised for their association (in this country) with parasitical bourgeois women.

A friend described how he was minding his own business in a pub, when some animal liberationists stomped up, distributing anti-fur tracts. My friend asked whether they were not being somewhat hypocritical, since they were wearing leather jackets. The incident almost resulted in fisticuffs, so outraged were the animal libbers at having their moral integrity called into question.

Lately, animal liberationists have stopped wearing any sort of animal

etarian cachet, and provide the means to publish uplifting and incomprehensible tracts.

Upper middle-class females also adopt this sort of lifestyle but are less inclined to spout politics. Women will usually only venture into subversive grouplets as part of a strategy to find a mate (which is about as sensible as joining a rail enthusiasts' society in the hope of acquiring a husband). As women they are more interested in controlling an individual man than in being the kingpin of a whole clique.

Revolutionaries are to be found haunting every low-life scene, spreading their moral tenets like syphilis. They are easily identifiable by their train-spotterish demeanour (at least the latter pester no one except British Rail employees).

Young Puritans have a compulsion to scatter slogans all around them. I thought it strange, for example, that someone had sprayed the lifts of a nearby tower block with anti poll-tax slogans. No one paid it anyway, and they were not pleased to have this fact advertised. It transpired that a young man, a J.P.'s son, was temporarily slumming it on the estate. He had decided that the locals needed their political consciousness raised.

This fellow also subscribed to the latest trend amongst the politically aware: he claimed to have renounced all narcotics. He said indulgence in drugs and alcohol was a weakness. Young Puritans take care to present an ascetic public image; while regularly getting off their heads in the privacy of their own squats.

Poverty is an amusing novelty to those who were brought up in comfort. Like Indian Saddhus, they imagine that by rejecting consumerism they will acquire moral superiority over their more worldly fellows. They sneer at the rest of society scrambling to make a living, for they have no idea what it is like to have nothing to show for a week's hard labour but a hangover on Sunday morning.

For the last couple of decades it has been de rigeur for the revolutionary to live in a squat or council flat. These are often their second homes. I know of one young agitator who owns a sizeable West Country estate. He maintains his credibility with a pied-a-terre in East London, courtesy of the local council.

Genteel rebels are hopeless at opening up their own squats. They make up for this deficiency by latching on to those who will do it for them. An American friend who squatted a vast Bloomsbury townhouse foolishly allowed it to become infested with a Channel 4 producer, a lady novelist, and a bunch of anarchist artists. They felt their own homes did not provide a sufficiently Bohemian environment for their creativity. My friend was evidently too Bohemian for them, for they joined forces to evict him by shopping him to the Home Office.

£120 for two hours work was a good deal more than I normally saw in a week.

Unconventional politics make people of this ilk feel pleasantly risqué, but at heart they are terrified by walks of life that differ from their own. Those who imagine they have rebelled against their backgrounds will call themselves revolutionary; all the better to insult those who scare them.

Puritanism

If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put on a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly.

George Orwell: The Road To Wigan Pier

REVOLUTIONARIES see their whole lives as a political statement. They make it their mission to hector those around them on the 'correct' way to speak, eat, dress, have sex, and earn a living. Moral rectitude is defined by symbolic acts of refusal. One must not eat meat, wear fur, say 'cunt', buy 'Playboy' or South African fruit.

'Causes' are excuses for mean-spirited inadequates to give themselves airs of superiority. The nature of the cause itself is irrelevant. Today's 'reactionary' will be tomorrow's 'progressive'. There are revolutionaries in Memphis, Tennessee, for example, who call themselves 'Hardliners'. They are anti-war, anti-hunting and vegetarian. They also oppose drinking, birth control, abortion and homosexuality. As the offspring of the 'hippie' generation, they are rebelling against the supposed decadence of their parents.

Preaching comes naturally to all the young Puritans on this side of the Atlantic, for they have been raised in the belief that it is their birthright to dictate to others. They are usually born of parents who are themselves the arbiters of moral values, whether in parliament, the press, academia, or on the Bench.

Today's typical young revolutionary graduated from Winchester school to a squat in Stoke Newington. Sensitive to plebian mockery, he lowered his braying tones to a mumble, and gleaned some rhyming slang from 'Minder'. He imagines he is spitting at bourgeois values by sticking myriad rings through his ears and arranging his hair in dreadlocks. He supports himself on handouts from worried Mummy and Daddy, while disguising the fact by pretending to live off the proceeds of despatch-riding.

Some find positions in printing co-ops, which lend the requisite prol-

Pacifists are outraged when their uniformed protectors turn on them. I am surprised at the amount of people who have never grasped the function of the police. The aftermath of every 'peaceful protest' includes TV interviews of disgruntled demonstrators complaining of having been truncheoned across the skull.

In peacetime parliamentary democracies allow non-violent protest as a means of reinforcing belief in 'freedom of speech', 'liberty of the individual', and similar fairy-tales. Most demonstrators enjoy a day out with their chums, skipping down the road, chanting and banging instruments. They believe that governments which allow them to do this are inherently nicer than other, more paranoid, regimes. Hence parliamentary democracies are a more efficient form of government than dictatorships. By tolerating 'peaceful protest' they hold the allegiance of a greater proportion of their populations.

Pacifism becomes a more popular creed in times of war, when middle-class men who wish to remain alive plead conscientious objection. My grandfather did so in 1916 and was rewarded with two years in Wormwood Scrubs. Working-class men, on the other hand, tended to 'disappear' during the two world wars. They were motivated by a sense of self-preservation, whereas the 'conchies' stressed their unwillingness to kill others. I have heard the stories of a few men who went 'underground'. They well understood the futility of taking a moral stand against a regime hell-bent upon despatching them to their destruction.

Revolution

I spent a couple of years as a revolutionary agitator in various grouplets. In a past century I might have thrown myself with equal passion into some Nonconformist religious sect. As a student in the nineteen seventies I just happened to find myself surrounded by a multitude of radicals: feminists, anarchists, Maoists and Trotskyists. I felt it was de rigeur to espouse one of these ideologies, believing that only dead-heads supported the status quo.

I was principally attracted to politics through a child-like desire to have the world explained. Like most young people I found uncertainty profoundly unsettling. Marxism provided me with a logical perspective through which to view life. It explained poverty and misery and supplied the heroes and villains which are so necessary for youth brought up on pantomimes and comic books. Lenin was heroic because he had actually conducted a revolution, Trotsky because he offered hope in his cohesive plan for an extension of that revolution.*

Armed with explanations for most social phenomena I felt intellectually superior to my fellow students and teachers. I could account for the decline of the USSR into a degenerated workers' state. I knew that Hitler was only able to take power because the Socialists of the Weimar Republic had crushed the revolutionary workers' movement.

On a personal level I felt equipped to sort out my own problems and to act as an advisor to my friends. Private angst, I reasoned, was no one's fault, but a natural product of class/ sex/ or racial oppression. Individual worries would be overcome by throwing oneself into the movement that was fighting to end all human misery. I would try to put my own problems into perspective by remembering the Trotskyists in Stalin's camps who sang the Internationale as they faced the firing squad.

Another appealing aspect of revolutionary politics was that they provided me with a social entrée. As soon as I declared myself to be a sympathiser of a certain group I would be showered with invitations to

* A couple of visits to the Soviet Union have cured me of my communist fantasies. I believe that ineptitude is one characteristic of Russian society that predates the revolution. Perhaps some Swiss efficiency rubbed off on Lenin during his exile in Zurich, enabling him to oust his more bumbling political rivals.

meetings, dinners, and parties. Rival groups courted me in the hope of making a conversion. Occasionally I got pissed at the expense of conservative students who thought they were being terribly risqué by inviting a Red to their functions.

Revolutionary groups exploit their appeal to lonely souls. I knew of several organisations who made it their practice to scour halls of residence, knocking on doors of students new to London. On the same principle, Moonies hang around long-distance bus stations accosting solitary travellers.

Many people join political groups in the hope of finding romance. A friend in Manchester said he always welcomed the representative of the Revolutionary Communist Party into his flat for a discussion because she wore a mini and fishnets.

One of the groups I supported frowned on anyone who had sexual relations with non-members. A female comrade had been expelled for sleeping with her factory foreman, a 'class enemy'. Once 'inside the space-ship' (as they called the party) personal ties with the outside world were discouraged.

Politics helped me overcome my natural shyness by providing me with an inexhaustible supply of conversational topics. I broke the ice at parties by hurling invective at revisionists.*

I built a protective armour of theory around myself, and had fun tilting at people who had done likewise. I armed myself with incisive critiques of state capitalism, popular fronts, and national liberation movements.

One day my armour was pierced by a passing skinhead in Portobello Road. He declined my invitation to buy a paper and asked whether I had nothing better to do. For over a year I had been dodging this question out of laziness and guilt.

Like myself, most people bury themselves in mindless political activism because popular morality has instilled in them the belief that 'doing things for others' is a valid justification for their existences. This delusion is particularly common amongst the female sex. Most of womenkind devote their lives to servicing others. They not only find their raisons

* I always admired the ability of members of the Workers' Revolutionary Party to remain poker-faced while denouncing political opponents as 'petty-bourgeois dilettantes' and 'neo-Kantian idealists'. The Workers' Institute of Brixton were even madder. I heard a girl who spoke with a Princess Diana accent tell a meeting that the Chinese people were building a weather machine which would be powerful enough to freeze Niagara Falls. The consequent damage to the American economy would be an act of retribution against US imperialism which had created the massive Chinese earthquake of 1978. Meanwhile, she assured us, the People's Army were tunnelling through the centre of the earth. They would emerge in Australia, where they would proceed to foment the glorious communist revolution.

his sensitivity.

Women who are prone to shrieking 'male violence' in public are almost certainly on the receiving end of it at home. The most militant anti-pornography campaigners I ever came across turned out to be living with men who battered them. They refused to examine their own motives for tolerating abuse; instead they made a scapegoat of pornographic literature and films as agents of violence against women.

Those who claim to reject any form of violence are people who in the last resort rely on the police to take care of them. The management committee of my local housing co-op called in police to evict squatters from a block they wanted to take over. Their excuse was that squatters were 'intimidating' members of the co-op by their 'aggressive' behaviour. Female co-op members told me they were relieved that the squatters were being kicked out, for some of them were engaged in prostitution. They claimed they had nothing against women who chose this occupation, only they tended to attract pimps and 'heavy' clients. Personally, I found it reassuring to see local women on the streets when walking home at night. I never had any trouble in the area.

If someone refuses to lift a finger to defend themselves in any circumstances that is their business. However, I have never known anyone who entirely lacked a sense of self-preservation. Usually pacifism is confined to the condemnation of other people who retaliate against aggression. From their moral high-ground pacifists claim that self-defence 'makes you as bad as they are'. On a TV debate over women's right to carry arms advice columnist Anna Raeburn opposed the motion, suggesting that instead women should chant Buddhist mantras to preserve them from attack when walking alone!

The sort of people who argue that rape victims should submit without a struggle are basically frightened for themselves. They are scared of self-reliant individuals, believing they undermine the 'protective' rôle of the police.

Those who condemn others for using violence in self-defence are usually trying to preserve some position of petty authority. Friends in a north London housing co-op discovered that one of its members had been beating up his girlfriend and threatening his other housemates with similar treatment if they did not keep quiet. When my friends suggested to the co-op's management committee that the fellow be physically removed from the house they were told that anyone who laid a finger on him would be expelled from the co-op for 'anti-social (behaviour)'. It was explained that there were 'procedures for dealing with these sort of cases'. Needless to say, the violent man remained in the house while his victims sought other places to live.

they put a brick through the window of the shop you wanted to loot. I have known plenty of working-class heroes use their girlfriends as punchbags when there was no fighting with the police or 'fascists' to be had.

A football hooligan who worked as a rent-boy told me the greatest joy in his life was being out with his firm: 'It's the best buzz in the world, knowing we're all in it together.' Yet he confessed to having been petrified when one of his regular clients greeted him outside Upton Park stadium. He knew quite well that his mates would have carved him up with their 'Uncle Stanleys' had they suspected him of being homosexual.

The lure of comradeship is not lost upon the armies of the world. I met a young squaddie on his way to the Gulf, and asked him why he was going. After a few whiskies he admitted his reluctance. He saw no point in risking his life for the coffers of oil companies and billionaire sheikhs. But his mates would be there, he explained, 'Greater love has no man than he who lays down his life for his friend.' Such morbid sentimentality betrays a sad lack of identity. He reminded me of all the would-be street-fighting heroes I had known.

Feminists and pacifists are wrong to suggest that men fight because of an innate blood-lust. Outright psychopaths are as likely to be found in an 'anti-sexist men's group' as they are in the British Army. Many people are steeped in a romantic notion of heroism which contrasts with their private sense of isolation. They seek to reconcile the two by joining the army, a football 'firm', or a revolutionary group.

The radicals of various pretensions who declare their complete opposition to violence are as sanctimonious as the riot fetishists are absurd. The creeping Jesus type who elevates pacifism to a sacred principle is easily recognisable. He has a penchant for baggy clothes, round glasses, and straggly hair, and makes a great show of romping with infants in front of the women he wants to attract. When he wants to go wild he smokes a little marijuana. He finds militant pacifism a useful camouflage for his own viciousness. The more a man bleats about his antipathy to all forms of violence the more likely he is to be beating up his girlfriend. I know of a whole household of 'peace activists' who resort to bashing each other when their emotional relationships become too fraught.

Creeping Jesuses use pacifism to compete with other men for female favours. A friend of mine once walked into a party to find an artist he despised trying to impress a group of feminists. 'I cannot remain in this room with that man', cried the artist upon spying my friend, his presence is intimidating and oppressive to me'. If he had let fly a punch or some bitchy remarks he might have risked losing the sympathy of the attendant women. Instead they began to bill and coo over the remarkable depths of

d'être in looking after their immediate families, but in becoming the handmaidens of 'higher causes'. Up and down the country middle-aged women busy themselves with organising church fêtes and embroidering altar pieces. Their daughters believe they are rebelling against their conditioning by peddling socialist literature on windy street corners. They arrange meetings and debates in upstairs rooms of pubs, occasionally making so bold as to address the meetings themselves on 'womens' issues'. Traditional female skills are also handy for typing up minutes and sweeping out the headquarters of subversive organisations. Such devotion is a form of atonement for the effrontery of being alive.

Feminists have already pointed out the ease with which male revolutionaries reduce their female comrades to dogsbodies. It would be more pertinent to question why so many women acquiesce to this treatment, but some feminists are too busy taking advantage of this aspect of female conditioning to do so. Many women in single sex groups play out their submissive roles with equal gusto. Separatism was initiated by women who wanted their own political domain in which to play their power games.

Some people are scared by the prospect of waking up in the morning and wondering what in the world to do. They relieve themselves of the problem by becoming careerists, drug addicts, parents, or revolutionaries. Tasks are arranged, as if by external necessity. These take precedence over personal desires. Of course, the perfect cadre, functionary or parent sees no contradiction between living for the party, the company, or the child and living for the self. They are driven to serve something outside themselves through a desperate fear of being useless and unneeded.

Just as many men feel useless after retirement, and quickly die, so revolutionaries cling to their causes to the point of breakdown. I knew many who believed that life without the party would be desolate to an unbearable degree.

Political organisations encourage their followers to immerse themselves in tales of failed uprisings, massacres, injustice and misery. I once found a young comrade in tears. She showed me a newspaper article she had been reading. It described the extermination of Guatemalan peasants by government death squads. 'I can't stand the cruelty of the world,' she said. A bright nineteen year old of low self-esteem, she was easy pickings for an organisation keen to exploit her feelings of helplessness in the face of the world's misery.

Almost all the party members were of middle-class origin, so they were well-practised at instilling guilt feelings in others. Their contacts had to be made to feel they should atone for their relatively 'privileged' existences. They could be shriven only by joining the party. The good

cadre disregards personal desires by shouldering the burdens of suffering humanity.

It took me until my mid-twenties to realise that I did not have to live for others, that joylessness helps no one at all, least of all myself. A few months in a Brazilian slum kicked my altruism in the gut. I made friends with youths who lived off their wits in the streets, and others who worked long hours in local factories. One fifteen year old took me around the Coca-Cola plant where he worked. His daily task was to scramble back and forth along a plank bridging a conveyor belt, righting bottles that had toppled over. Had he fallen off his plank, he would almost certainly have been sucked into a giant metal drum that scooped up the bottles.

Yet my friend was happy with his weekly wage and considered it beneath his dignity to complain about his job. Grumbling about their lot in life was unacceptable to his circle (in contrast to the Brazilian middle-classes, who did little else). When I asked whether they were not discontented with their poverty they laughed and suggested we go to the beach rather than discuss 'serious' things. They would have laughed even harder at the notion of earnest people sitting in smoky rooms above British pubs discussing their plight and that of millions like them.

For their part, revolutionaries are enraged by those who refuse to be cast in the role of oppressed. My Brazilian friends were utterly cynical of politics, preferring to dedicate their lives to football, samba, carnival, rum, sex, and swimming. They realised that the only way out of their poverty was by crime, an escape route that is unacceptable to political agitators in any country. An insubordinate 'victim' class threatens the livelihood of the revolutionary.

The spectacle of revolutionaries locked in debate over the dispossessed is absurd. They work themselves into a passion about people for whom they do not give a damn in order to browbeat their opponents and impress their audience. Orwell pilloried this type of ham actor in 'The Road to Wigan Pier': 'Sometimes I look at a Socialist – the intellectual tract-writing type of Socialist – with his pullover and fuzzy hair and Marxian quotation and wonder what the devil his motive really is. It is often difficult to believe that it is a love for anybody, especially of the working-class, from whom he is of all people the furthest removed. The underlying motive of many socialists, I believe, is simply a hypertrophied sense of order'²

Greater than the urge to impose order onto chaos is the revolutionary's desperation to impose his or her will onto others. The world is full of petty dictators scrambling for power. Those who feel thwarted by society at large find it easy enough to surround themselves with lackeys and call themselves a 'revolutionary group'.

by modern technology. The lucky ones get to identify themselves on the evening news, filmed for posterity and police files.

Time between 'events' is passed writing accounts of the action and predictions of trouble to come. The latest collection of 'what I did during my riot' essays emerged after the events of March 31st 1990 in a tome dedicated 'to all working-class heroes'.³ One writer describes the thrill of being able to get back at those he hates: 'seeing those coppers run was the most empowering moment ever. I wasn't taken over by some sort of bloodlust, for me it was revenge, pure and simple. I've seen the police in action for years: making arrests for no reason, lying in court, smashing picket lines, beating prisoners – there's no end to it. So given a chance, I want to get them back.'

The police represent oppression; rioters, like terrorists, believe that by targeting symbols of viciousness, they will act as catalysts for the masses to rise up against their oppressors. Even if the whole edifice of the State were to come tumbling down, there would always be aspiring leaders and guardians of public order waiting in the wings for a chance to have a crack at the whip.

I find demonstrations dull and confrontations with the police alarming. I first experienced police methods of crowd control in 1977. I had trotted down to Lewisham in south London to protest a National Front march through the area. I joined tens of thousands of people blocking New Cross Road, just as the police charged their horses into the crowd, batoning anyone within reach. I wondered what on earth I was doing there apart from trying to preserve myself from injury and arrest.

Between that day and this, scenes of police brutality have become so familiar that I am surprised that people are still shocked by them.

Mass action, on the other hand, can be very seductive. I was cheered by the sight of Brixton police station set ablaze by Molotov cocktails. East Europeans say they felt a similar euphoria when they tore down statues of Lenin.

It is not merely a question of attacking symbols of repression; the true appeal of rioting, like football hooliganism and war, is that it allows lonely souls to find camaraderie in banding together against a common enemy. I have met both ex-soldiers and revolutionaries for whom solitary activity is a terrifying prospect. They go through life sustained by the 'all for one and one for all' ethos. As one of them said: 'It's easier to be obnoxious in groups.'

Belonging to a side generates a spurious feeling of closeness to one's fellow humans. The line of reasoning that goes 'your enemy is my enemy, therefore you're my friend' shows a naïve degree of trust. It is odd to assume that someone is a thoroughly fine human being because

couple of times through sheer carelessness. Then I discovered that in those circles trials take on a mystique of their own. Defendants are ennobled as victims of State repression.

Street fighters live in a 'Boy's Own Paper' fantasy world. Their worship of riots and picket-line battles is rationalised as the only way for the poor and oppressed to improve their existences. They puff themselves up with self-importance as the harbingers of the revolution.

Of all the elements that tried to make political capital out of the social unrest in Britain in the early eighties, the Class War group acquired the most notoriety. They are mainly white boys from comfortable backgrounds who managed to produce a tabloid eulogising the miners' strike, riots, and general violence against the police. Their ingrained puritanism (they were against 'hard' drugs and pornography) did not prevent them from accepting contributions from a number of working-girls, enabling them to launch their publication. Witty headlines, such as ANOTHER FUCKING ROYAL PARASITE (to mark the birth of Prince Harry) boosted sales to about 5,000 a month by 1985. The government, police and media readily seized upon the image of mysterious anarchist trouble-makers. Class War was given massive publicity in order to emphasise the supposed torpidity of the lower orders. The powers-that-be like to believe that the poor are incapable of rebelling unless goaded.

Class War and other anarchic grouplets made a few attempts to brew their own confrontations with the police. 'Bash the Rich' marches through Kensington, Hampstead, Henley and Bristol were raggle-taggle parades resulting in a predictable number of arrests. Otherwise, these subversives dedicated themselves to following riots, wherever they occurred, in order to enhance their self-images as dedicated street-fighters. Whenever rumours of trouble began to circulate, riot enthusiasts would huddle around their short-wave radios with the intense concentration of plane-spotters beneath a control-tower. As soon as the police revealed the whereabouts of the latest disturbance the keenest followers would roar off in battered vans, leaving the rest to trail down by public transport. 'Masks' (scarves) tied over the mouth and nose were the hallmark of someone who ostensibly meant business. A mask lent credibility to a boy who was about to spend a couple of hours scampering around the back-streets, keeping out of range of police charges.

The high spot of the day for rioters (and football hooligans) comes when they congregate in the pub after the day's exertions. They relive the experience with their friends, swapping tales of derring-do and narrow escapes. Minor injuries are brandished as trophies, even if they were only acquired by tripping over the kerb. The back-slapping fraternity is aided

The petty tyrants who lead revolutionary parties are beset by paranoia over having their power usurped. I once watched the central committee of a Trotskyist group rant at one of their 'comrades'. They accused her of failing to pay back some money she had borrowed from the organisation. The more she pleaded with them not to suspend her membership the louder they screamed that she was guilt-tripping them, and that they would not tolerate her attempts at moral blackmail. I sensed that none of them gave a damn for the money. They had found a convenient whipping-post on which to vent their inner rage and frustration. This was a show designed to impress each other and to awe their audience.

Without followers the bully would have no power. Victims are selected in order to demonstrate to the rest their fate if they do not toe the line. Fear and a wish for an easy life turn people into lackeys. Some of these hope that by licking up enough spittle they will inherit power for themselves.

I did not have to wait long to become victimised myself. The leader of my organisation, a man who had failed in his attempt to become an M.P. in his own country, imagined that I was conspiring against him behind his back. He called a meeting at which he accused me of 'poisonous cliquism'. One after another, party members responded by rising to their feet, facing me, and pointing out the counter-revolutionary implications of my crime (as I watched their displays of fake passion, I had a flashback of my former headmistress holding the entire school in detention because someone had decorated the organ with flower stickers. Her anger had seemed as absurd as the manufactured rage of my 'comrades'). I was apparently guilty of undermining the leadership, and hence the entire organisation. Indignant, and loath to gratify them with a show-trial confession, I dropped out of the group.

A year later I ran into a bunch of my former comrades. They half-apologised, explaining that the erstwhile leader had been expelled. It transpired that he had been beating up his wife, and another comrade had attempted suicide because he had convinced her that to have the baby she desired would be incompatible with revolutionary socialism. I replied that he would not have got away with his behaviour for so long if they had not all been so sheepish. I felt I had seen the Stalin purges in microcosm, and no, thanks, I did not want to be rehabilitated.

Petty tyrants like the leader of that group can spend years terrorising those around them. Obviously not every power-hungry sadist gets to run governments and corporations. Aspiring dictators and their followers wait for mass social upheavals in the hope of a chance to have a crack at the whip.

I once rented a flat from an 82-year-old Pole, who had been an army captain when the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed. As an officer, he

had been interned in a Russian prison camp for two years. A group had been taken out each week to be shot. He was in the group designated by the letter 'T'. They had reached group 'G' when they stopped the executions without explanation, and kept the rest prisoner. At times the Polish officers were reduced to living on grass. My landlord was a cheerful old man who would sit surrounded by his war memorabilia, taking the piss out of his tenants with malicious glee. Night after night, however, we were awakened by cries and pleas. Despite his nightmares, he said he did not resent the Russians, 'they're just people like us.' He reserved his hatred for the Komsomol, despising them for their mindless enthusiasm and their eagerness to obey orders. Some of the revolutionaries I have known would have made fine Komsomol executioners given half a chance.

Anarchy

Politics becomes like a drug. In fact it's a means to leave reality behind because reality is so crap.

Preface to 'The Abolition of Work' by Sheffield Anarchists

REPELLED by leftist bullies acting out their power fantasies I turned towards the anarchist milieu. This seemed logical, as anarchists claim to despise power. They make this contempt clear by arranging their chairs in circles at meetings, whereas Marxists sit in rows, with speaker, chairperson or leader in the 'teacher's' position.

Anarchism is a comfortably vague ideology. To many of its followers it is nothing more than a label chosen to bestow a cachet of rebelliousness*.

Most anarchists share the unsavoury personality traits of Marxists. Before long I realised I was surrounded by the familiar rag-bag mix of wife-beaters and emotional cripples. The only difference is that anarchy appeals to the sort of person who finds it hard to get out of bed for Saturday morning paper sales.

I gravitated towards the reputed trouble-makers. The politics of the balaclava-and-Palestinian-scarf brigade ran to little more than an obsession with street-fighting. Despite their plans to meet on Hackney Marshes for riot practice, no one ever made the supreme effort of turning up.

Like leftists this milieu suffered from an inflated sense of its own significance. Anarchists wallowed in persecution fantasies. One activist suggested we prepare false documents in order to skip off abroad when the imminent State clampdown struck. This fellow later calmed down after receiving a substantial inheritance.

I was particularly attracted by the anger of one of these young men (who eventually became a successful company lawyer), so I hung around. My ability to think for myself faded to the extent that I got arrested a

* I have met a few older anarchists whom I liked. Their faith in humanity flies in the face of all empirical and historical evidence, yet they remain charming and loath to proselytise.